

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004227

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - ERIC
BARBORIAK
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OPRC KMDR KPAO TW

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: RUMSFELD'S TRIP TO CHINA

¶1. Summary: The second part of a TV interview with President Chen Shui-bian, which was aired Monday evening, carried the front-page headlines in most major Chinese-language Taipei dailies October 18. (The first part of the interview was broadcast on Sunday night.) Almost all major Taipei newspapers reported on their front pages Chen's remarks in the interview claiming that he can provide evidence to prove that People First Party (PFP) Chairman James Soong had a secret meeting with Chen Yunlin, the director of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, during a trip to the United States earlier this year, in which Soong promised opposition to Taiwan's arms procurements from the United States in exchange for Beijing's nod on his China tour. According to the news reports, Soong soon refuted Chen's accusation and demanded a public apology from Chen.

The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, also carried on page two Chen's remarks in the interview with regard to his appointment of Legislative Yuan President Wang Jin-pyng to attend the APEC summit with the headline: "Bian: China Is Worried That Wang's Rise Will Affect [Taipei Mayor] Ma [Ying-jeou's Plan] to Run in the [2008] Presidential Elections." The pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, ran an inclusive interview in its inside page with U.S. Pacific Command Chief Admiral William Fallon, which was topped with the headline: "Fallon: Taiwan Should Be Prepared for Beijing's Attacks." The sub-headline added: "The Pacific Command Will Continue to Satisfy the Requirements [Stipulated in] the Taiwan Relations Act and Defend Taiwan When the U.S. President Orders It to Do So, But Taiwan Itself Also Needs to Have Effective Defense Capabilities."

¶2. Several newspapers editorialized on Chen's remarks made during his interview with Sanlih TV. Columnist Antonio Chiang commented on U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's current visit to China in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily." Chiang said Rumsfeld's trip will heat up Washington-Beijing ties, but in the meantime, it also indicated that the United States' attempt to stabilize its Asian policy will remain relatively the same. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said Rumsfeld's visit is long overdue and hopefully will help to restore some trust and momentum to the U.S.-China military and strategic relationship. End summary.

A) "The United States Wants a Soft Landing on China"

Columnist Antonio Chiang commented in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 570,000] (10/18):

"U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who has many times criticized China's military expansion in public, arrives in Beijing today for his first official visit. Rumsfeld's trip will heat up Washington-Beijing ties, but in the meantime, it also indicated that the United States' attempt to stabilize its Asian policy will remain more or less the same. .

"As a matter of fact, the Bush administration is now putting a majority of its energy and efforts on Middle East issues because the area ranging from the Middle East to Central Asia and from South Asia to Iran has long-term strategic interests for the Americans, whether it is with regard to oil, the war on terrorism or nuclear proliferation.

"Subtle changes have occurred in the Middle East region recently, which have thus produced a strong impact on the ties between Israel and Palestine and politics of those countries like Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. U.S. President George W. Bush believes that his Mideast policy has harvested good results, but evidently only a few people agree with him. Nevertheless, once the United States sets foot in this area, it will only be dragged deeper and will not be

able to get away easily in a short period of time.

"Bush has put the United States' strategic focus as well as history's evaluation of him in the Middle East; he can hardly divert his attention to issues in Asia and can only seek a `soft landing' in the region via micro adjustment. Even though Rumsfeld is well-versed in the China threat, he still needs to adjust his attitude toward China for the sake of U.S. strategic interests because China now plays a key role in the United States' plan of soft landing in Asia. ."

B) "Reluctant Rumsfeld in PRC"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (10/18):

". The Beijing trip [by U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld] is a must and can't be further delayed. China's recent effort at Westernization, particularly in supporting the U.S.-led anti-terror war and curbing North Korea's nuclear ambition, have been helpful and gratifying. The rising China is not a fundamental rival like the former Soviet Union but a vital `stakeholder' in advancing America's global agenda.

"The Pentagon hoped the visit could contribute to improving a military-to-military relationship that fractured in April 2001 with the midair collision of a Chinese fighter and an American surveillance plane over China's southern coast. Ship visits and officer exchanges have resumed since then, but slowly.

"On the other hand, Beijing seeks to demonstrate, by hosting a Bush administration hardliner, that Washington is not shunning China as a looming military foe, and that China is not a security threat or a strategic competitor to the U.S. .

"Rumsfeld's visit is long overdue, and hopefully will help to restore some trust and momentum to the U.S.-China military and strategic relationship. Yet the depth of distrust and misperceptions in both military establishments toward the other is palpable and not easily overcome.

"For Taiwan, Rumsfeld's visit is a welcome change of approach for the Bush administration. With China as a `responsible stakeholder' in managing global affairs, Washington is better posed to maintain the peaceful Taiwan status quo."

PAAL